

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission

Policy Statement for Registered Nurses Performing Procedural Sedation

It is within the scope of practice of a Registered Nurse to assist in the care of patients receiving procedural sedation during therapeutic and diagnostic procedures.

Procedural sedation, otherwise known as conscious sedation, is defined as a technique of administering pharmacological agents to induce a state that allows the patient to tolerate unpleasant procedures while maintaining cardiorespiratory function. Procedural sedation is intended to result in a depressed level of consciousness but one that allows the patient to maintain airway control independently and continuously. Procedural sedation should be given so that there is a sufficient margin of safety to render unintended loss of protective reflexes unlikely. During procedural sedation, there must be a licensed independent healthcare provider present who is credentialed by the facility as capable of recognizing and managing airway emergencies.

Excluded from these guidelines are:

1. patients receiving inhalation anesthetics (except the use of Nitronox as an analgesic)
2. patients who receive analgesia for pain control without sedatives
3. patients who receive sedation solely for purpose of managing altered mental status
4. patients who are sedated for the purpose of intubation

To ensure that nurses assisting in procedural sedation receive appropriate and continuous training and support, the Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission recommends that all providers and institutions using nurses in procedural sedation should have in place written policies and procedures that contain, at a minimum, the following elements:

1. Guidelines for patient selection, monitoring, and drug administration.
2. Protocols for managing potential complications or emergency situations
3. Specific educational and training requirements
4. Specific yearly evaluation and continuing competency requirements.

Registered nurses in Washington have the legislated authority to execute a medical regimen as provided in RCW 18.79.040. Nurses practicing procedural sedation should be an integral part of the health care team responsible for developing and monitoring the policies and procedures related to procedural sedation.

The above guidelines do not imply that registered nurses may administer general anesthesia, whether or not it is a component part of procedural sedation. General anesthesia is defined as a medically controlled state of unconsciousness accompanied by loss of protective reflexes, including the inability to maintain a patent airway independently.